

CMS Connection

February 2021

Director's Monthly Message: Janel L. Forde



With the arrival of February, we are into the 11th month of the State's COVID-19 response, and on a brighter note, more than halfway through winter! The work of CMS continues undiminished due to the ongoing hard work, commitment, and dedication of our staff and service partners.

We look forward every year to February and **Black History Month** as we observe and remember together the countless contributions of Black Americans to our nation's long history.

We celebrate, this year, **the growing availability of vaccines to help us all overcome the threat of COVID-19**. While the State moves through the full vaccination distribution plan, we should continue to practice social distancing, stay home whenever we can and wear masks.

Often these days, it seems my thoughts turn from simply being proud, gratified, and a little amazed by our many accomplishments at CMS in this difficult environment, to a more serious consideration of why our staff members seem to be so successful in producing the critical work we need done despite the various barriers and hardships attributable to such things as social unrest, debilitating viruses, and stay-at-home requirements. I believe the answer comes in a single word: **Creativity**.

From the very beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, **our CMS teams have been proactive in finding ways to get the work done, whatever is needed**. That has taken dedication and foresight to be sure, but such a commitment can only lead to a tangible solution through the creativity of the people on our teams – and their collective refusal to give up or acknowledge that whatever it is cannot be done.

Our teams have routinely said, **"It can be done, and we are going to figure out a way to do it."** And then they do.

Creativity is how CMS has assisted dozens of agencies in **lowering operating costs by millions of dollars each year and freed up hundreds of thousands of hours of work time, simply by teaching teams the best practices for analyzing and revising processes of various sizes and purposes**. Our teams guiding operational excellence in every Bureau of CMS also are making a huge difference, with additional gains in sight.

BEP is also helping agencies across the State increase representation of diverse contractors through the development of a new methodology. This is the first change to the procurement formula for since its inception and will help ensure that diversity goals are attainable.

We are seeing our creativity carry us to the next level of management and leadership. As a result, we have gone through nearly a year of greatly reduced physical presence on site, working virtually or by phone whenever possible and distanced at all times, and yet, **in many ways, our teams have never been closer or more productive than many are right now**.

This kind of creativity helps us in effective problem-solving on long-term projects, and in our day-to-day work as well. The question always for CMS is how to make things work better administratively for all of us in every agency – or for just us in CMS – and largely through creativity our dedicated CMS staff responds resoundingly to the challenges every day.

It can be done, and we are going to figure out how to do it. CMS staff members through teamwork and creativity are showing us how every single day. Keep up that great attitude and the success it yields. **Creativity and teamwork are always a winning combination.**



CMS CELEBRATES
BLACK
HISTORY MONTH



Team of the Month – CMS Leasing Team, Bureau of Property Management



Albert Coll, CMS Transactions and Property Administration Manager

A seven-member CMS Leasing team from the **Bureau of Property Management** has been named the CMS Exemplary Employee Team of the Month for February 2021 for its work in dramatically reducing the lease renewal backlog and improving client services throughout the State. The team completed process improvements that have more than tripled the monthly lease completion rate in less than a year.

The Team of the Month is led by **Albert Coll**, CMS Transactions and Property Administration Manager, with significant support from CMS Policy Advisor **Phoebe Downey**, who provided technical expertise and organization to the effort. The team of CMS Leasing Representatives involved oversees property in all Illinois regions and includes **Brent Daily, Thomas Gaudreau, Katherine Parker, Bill Fox, and James Kolaz**. Kolaz won the individual CMS Exemplary Employee of the Month honor in February 2020 for his leasing client-service work in the Southern District.

"This is an unexpected recognition for all of us, and it is a great honor," said Coll, who served as Assistant Chief Counsel for CMS from 2014 to 2018 before assuming a similar role at the Department of Agriculture until late 2019 when he returned to CMS to take his current position.

CMS Chief of Operations **Ayse Kalaycioglu** said **the leasing team's work after Coll's return eliminated a backlog of more than 130 expired and unresolved leases, nearly a quarter of the number the State manages overall**. By coordinating the effort and involving various State agencies and the Chief Procurement Office, the team streamlined and integrated new interactive communication and tracking methods, improved personal attention to client needs, and increased the average number of contracts finalized per month from 4 or 5 per month a year ago, to 15 to 20 per month today.

"This has been a real team effort, and we cannot say enough about the dedication of all the people involved in this and the gains made," Kalaycioglu said. "You have to remember we have been affected by the outcomes of a two-year budget impasse (in 2016 and 2017) and resulting year-long statewide hold on lease renewals, dating to House Joint Resolution 63 in 2017. The backlog mounted quickly and made it difficult to see any light at the end of the tunnel, Kalaycioglu added. "This team went to work and changed all that."

Coll says the team achieved success by focusing on one priority step at a time. "We were in a situation where the general procurement system we were trying to fit into was not tailored at all toward lease transactions, so in effect, we were trying to implement a system that no one knew how

to use," Coll said. The old tracking approach via spreadsheet, in place for years, simply would not work as it did not integrate with the new BidBuy system. That required a new approach and an improved process to move things forward quickly.

"Fortunately, we were able to bring Phoebe Downey in to help us work through some of these things," Coll said. "Phoebe walked into a horrific trial by fire with an inventory system riddled with errors and a history of poor maintenance. But she works hard, she is very smart, she learns quickly, and she is methodical in her approach."



Phoebe Downey, CMS Policy Advisor

Working with the CMS Data Resource Team, including **Erik Colon** (recipient of the CMS Distinguished Deputy Director Award for 2020), **Patrick Nolan**, and **Elisa Martinez** (recipient of the CMS Exemplary Employee of the Month Award for January 2021), "Phoebe was able to identify the problem and organize solutions," Coll said, in this case, establishing a Sharepoint application to improve lease tracking and access project status." Most important, the team had identified a way to move past the problems of integration with the BidBuy system, and leasing representatives were able to offer much better service and information to clients.

"I have appreciated the team and the whole team approach, and fortunately, I enjoy a good challenge," said Downey, who joined CMS in February 2020. "With COVID happening in March, things were very different than I thought they would be when I joined CMS the month before." As seen in other areas of CMS, COVID restrictions seemed to unite teams in their activities rather than inhibit teamwork. **"COVID bonded us, really, and the team arose to the challenge."**

In some ways, Downey said, social distancing requirements have helped the team to better understand trends on future space needs. "It helped us align the space requests we have with best practices evolving throughout the industry," Downey added. "For instance, we don't need a conference room or table in every executive office anymore because virtual meetings can be very effective and save a lot of time."

For Downey, the key to the team's success was embodied in the quiet, effective project management by Coll and the empowering leadership of Kalaycioglu. "Ayse had great confidence in us and provided the example for just being clear in what we are doing, working together consistently every day, and understanding what is going on and what is expected," Downey added. "Communications improved a lot, and we got a lot better at working together. Albert has been great to work with – he is very methodical and organized, and he helps all of us work together in the same way."

Safe Lifting

Back injuries account for one in every five workplace injuries. The back is a network of fragile ligaments, discs, and muscles which can easily be thrown out of order. The back's complex design breaks down when it's forced to perform activities it was not designed to do. Lifting with the back twisted or bent just begs for a pulled muscle or ruptured disc.

One sure way to risk injuring the back is to lift heavy or bulky loads improperly or unassisted. Never be afraid to ask for help with loads that you know you cannot lift safely. Lift with good sense and a little extra help from a co-worker or mechanical aid when necessary.

- If you decide you are capable of lifting a light load, make sure you lift correctly.
- Move in so that your feet are close to the base of the object to be lifted.
- Face the object squarely. Bend your knees and squat over the item to be lifted. In this position, the back gets added lifting strength and power from the legs and arms.
- Move up close to the item, because the backbone must act as a supporting column, and it takes the least strain close in.
- Tilt the item on edge with its long axis straight up so that the center of the weight is as high as possible above the ground.
- Still squatting, the feet should be set with legs pointed right at the load, with the back straightened, the worker may then grasp the load with both arms and slowly stand up with it, pushing up with the leg muscles. If you can't lift slowly, you can't lift safely.

Steps how to lift correctly:

1. Prepare: Protect your feet and hands with safety footwear and work gloves, warm up with stretches. Test the load first.
2. Look: keep your head up and looking forward.
3. Stabilize: take a wide stance, with one foot slightly forward.
4. Grip: use both hands, and grasp opposite corners.
5. Lift: lift using your legs.
6. Balance: keep your back out to balance the load.
7. Tighten: Tighten your abdomen and breathe out as you lift.
8. Hold: hold the object close and keep your back straight. If the item is too heavy use a lifting device or get someone to help.



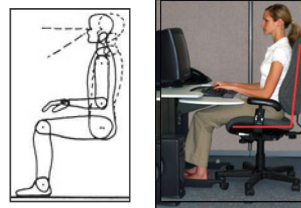
Working Position

To understand the best way to set up a computer workstation, it is helpful to understand the concept of neutral body positioning. This is a comfortable working posture in which your joints are naturally aligned. Working with the body in a neutral position reduces stress and strain on the muscles, tendons, and skeletal system and reduces your risk of developing a musculoskeletal disorder (MSD). The following are important considerations when attempting to maintain neutral body postures while working at the computer workstation:

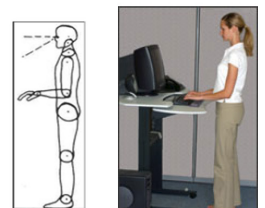
- Hands, wrists, and forearms are straight, in-line and roughly parallel to the floor.
- Head is level, forward facing, and balanced. Generally it is in-line with the torso.
- Shoulders are relaxed and upper arms hang normally at the side of the body.
- Elbows stay in close to the body and are bent between 90 and 120 degrees.
- Feet are fully supported by the floor or a footrest may be used if the desk height is not adjustable.
- Back is fully supported with appropriate lumbar support when sitting vertical or leaning back slightly.
- Thighs and hips are supported and generally parallel to the floor.
- Knees are about the same height as the hips with the feet slightly forward.

Neutral Body Postures for your Workstation

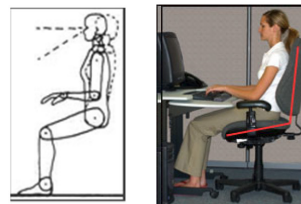
Upright sitting posture



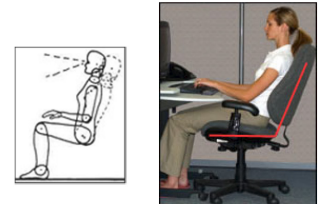
Standing posture



Declined sitting posture



Reclined sitting posture



Benefit Corner - February is Heart Health Awareness Month

Know the Difference Cardiovascular Disease, Heart Disease, Coronary Heart Disease

1. Cardiovascular Disease

"Cardiovascular disease" is a term for all types of diseases that affect the heart or blood vessels, including, [coronary heart disease](#), [stroke](#), [heart failure](#) and [peripheral artery disease](#).

2. Heart Disease

"Heart disease" is a catch-all phrase for a variety of conditions that affect the heart's structure and function. Keep in mind all heart diseases are cardiovascular diseases, but not all cardiovascular diseases are heart disease. The most common type of heart disease is coronary heart disease.

3. Coronary Heart disease

"Coronary heart disease" is often referred to simply as "heart disease," although it's not the only type of heart disease. Another term for it is coronary artery disease. Coronary heart disease occurs when plaque (a combination of fat, cholesterol, calcium, and other substances found in the blood) builds up in your arteries.

What can you do to protect yourself from cardiovascular disease?

There's a lot you can do to protect your heart:

- Ask your doctor about your blood pressure, cholesterol, and A1C.
- Reduce the sodium, and increase the fruits, vegetables, and whole grains in your diet.
- Be physically active.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Don't smoke.
- Manage stress.
- Keep your diabetes under control.

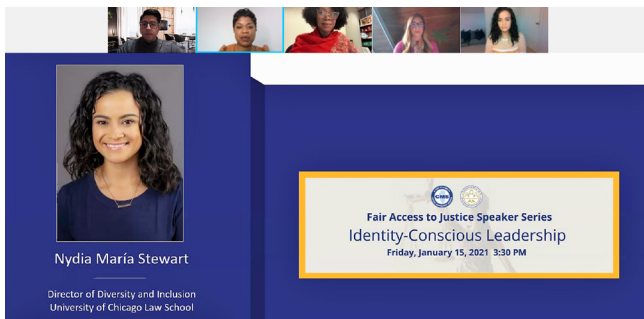
For more information about heart disease, visit the [National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute](#).



The CMS Benefits team and Aetna during Heart Health Month 2020

Events Corner

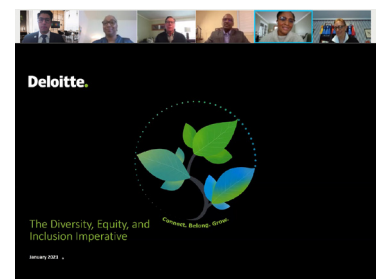
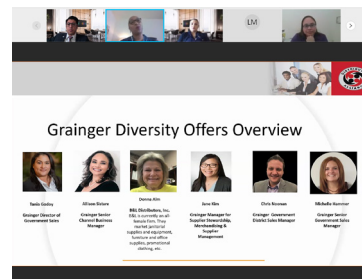
Fair Access to Justice



Diversity and Inclusion hosted the second event in the Fair Access to Justice series about Identity-Conscious Leadership with **Nydia Marie Stewart, Director of Diversity and Inclusion from the University of Chicago Law School**. The webinar focused on the identity-conscious approach to leadership and offered practical suggestions for removing barriers to inclusion.

If you missed this session, please [click here](#) to view the recording.

BEP Industry Conversations



The Business Enterprise Program (BEP) hosted two Industry conversations on January 28, 2021 with **Deloitte and Grainger** for business owners interested in subcontractor opportunities. During the sessions, BEP provided insights about the benefits of certification and how to access procurement opportunities with the State.

Visit the links below to access the session recordings.

[Industry Conversation with Deloitte](#)
[Industry Conversation with Grainger](#)



State of Illinois
Central Management Services

CMS Illinois Department of
Central Management Services

Office of the Director
Janel L. Forde
(217) 782-2141

For more information on this newsletter or any other CMS initiatives, contact:

Marjani Williams • Deputy Director: (312) 814-1676
Wendy Butler • Director of Governmental Affairs: (217) 785-1941